



Independent sets in direct products of vertex-transitive graphs

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ABSTRACT

The direct product $G \times H$ of graphs G and H is defined by

$$V(G \times H) = V(G) \times V(H)$$

and

$$E(G \times H) = \{(u_1, v_1), (u_2, v_2)\} : (u_1, u_2) \in E(G) \text{ and } (v_1, v_2) \in E(H)\}.$$

In this paper, we will prove that

$$\alpha(G \times H) = \max\{\alpha(G)|H|, \alpha(H)|G|\}$$

holds for all vertex-transitive graphs G and H , which provides an affirmative answer to a problem posed by Tardif (1998) [11]. Furthermore, the structure of all maximum independent sets of $G \times H$ is determined.

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1. Introduction

Let G and H be two graphs. The direct product $G \times H$ of G and H is defined by

$$V(G \times H) = V(G) \times V(H)$$

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and

$$E(G \times H) = \{(u_1, v_1), (u_2, v_2)\} : (u_1, u_2) \in E(G) \text{ and } (v_1, v_2) \in E(H)\}.$$

It is easy to see this product is commutative and associative, and the product of more than two graphs is well defined. For a graph G , the products $G^n = G \times G \times \cdots \times G$ is called the n -th power of G .

An interesting problem is the independence number of $G \times H$. It is clear that if I is an independent set of G or H , then the preimage of I under projections is an independent set of $G \times H$, and so $\alpha(G \times H) \geq \max\{\alpha(G)|H|, \alpha(H)|G|\}$. Here $|G|$ denotes the order of G , i.e., $|V(G)|$. It is natural to ask whether the equality holds or not. In general, the equality does not hold for non-vertex-transitive graphs (see [7]). So Tardif [11] posed the following problem.

Problem 1.1. (See Tardif [11].) Does the equality

$$\alpha(G \times H) = \max\{\alpha(G)|H|, \alpha(H)|G|\}$$

hold for all vertex-transitive graphs G and H ?

Furthermore, it immediately raises another interesting problem:

Problem 1.2. When $\alpha(G \times H) = \max\{\alpha(G)|H|, \alpha(H)|G|\}$, is every maximum independent set of $G \times H$ the preimage of an independent set of one factor under projections?

If the answer to Problem 1.2 is yes, we then say the direct product $G \times H$ is *MIS-normal* (maximum-independent-set-normal). Furthermore, the direct product $G_1 \times G_2 \times \cdots \times G_n$ is said to be *MIS-normal* if every maximum independent set of it is the preimage of an independent set of one factor under projections.

The two problems have received some attention. Frankl [6] and Valencia-Pabon and Vera [12] solved Problem 1.1 for Kneser graphs and circular graphs, respectively. Ahlswede et al. [1] generalized Frankl's results. Ku and Wong [9] investigated the structure of maximum independent sets in direct products of permutation graphs; Wang and Yu [13] proved that both Problems 1.1 and 1.2 have positive answers if one of G and H is a bipartite graph. Larose and Tardif [10] investigated the structures of maximum independent sets in powers of circular graphs, Kneser graphs and truncated simplices. For an arbitrary vertex-transitive graph G , they asked whether or not G^n is *MIS-normal* for all $n \geq 2$ if G^2 is *MIS-normal*. This question has been answered positively independently by Ku and McMillan [8] and the author [15].

Given a graph G and a real number r , a *fractional r -coloring* of G is a mapping f which assigns to each independent set I of G a real number $f(I) \in [0, 1]$ so that $\sum f(I) = r$ and for any vertex v , $\sum_{v \in I} f(I) \geq 1$. The *fractional chromatic number* $\chi_f(G)$ of G is the minimum r such that G has a fractional r -coloring. It is well known that if G is a vertex transitive graph, then $\chi_f(G) = |V(G)|/\alpha(G)$. A generalization of Problem 1.1 is studied in [16], where the following question is asked: Is it true that for any graphs G and H , $\chi_f(G \times H) = \min\{\chi_f(G), \chi_f(H)\}$? After the original version of this paper, this question was answered positively in [17], which implies a positive solution to Problem 1.1.

In this paper we shall solve both Problem 1.1 and Problem 1.2. To state our results we need to introduce some notations and notions.

For a graph G , let $I(G)$ denote the set of all maximum independent sets of G . Given a subset A of $V(G)$, we define

$$N_G(A) = \{b \in V(G) : (a, b) \in E(G) \text{ for some } a \in A\},$$

$$N_G[A] = N_G(A) \cup A \quad \text{and} \quad \bar{N}_G[A] = V(G) - N_G[A].$$

If G is clear from the context, for simplicity, we will omit the index G .

In [15], by the so-called “No-Homomorphism” lemma of Albertson and Collins [2] we proved the following result.

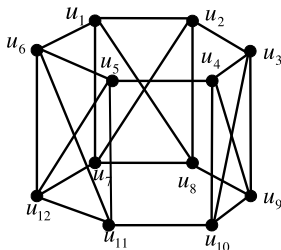


Fig. 1. Graph G.

Proposition 1.3. Let G be a vertex-transitive graph. Then, for every independent set A of G , $\frac{|A|}{|N_G[A]|} \leq \frac{\alpha(G)}{|V(G)|}$. Equality implies that $|S \cap N_G[A]| = |A|$ for every $S \in I(G)$, and in particular $A \subseteq S$ for some $S \in I(G)$.

An independent set A in G is said to be *imprimitive* if $|A| < \alpha(G)$ and $\frac{|A|}{|N[A]|} = \frac{\alpha(G)}{|V(G)|}$. And G is called *IS-imprimitive* if G has an imprimitive independent set. In any other cases, G is called *IS-primitive*.

Note that a disconnected vertex-transitive graph G is IS-imprimitive. Hence an IS-primitive vertex-transitive graph G must be connected. But, conversely, an IS-imprimitive graph is not necessarily disconnected. For example, the graph G in Fig. 1 is connected and $\{u_1, u_{12}\}$ is an imprimitive independent set of it.

The following theorem is the main result of this paper.

Theorem 1.4. Let G and H be two vertex-transitive graphs with $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \geq \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$. Then

$$\alpha(G \times H) = \alpha(G)|H|,$$

and exactly one of the following holds:

- (i) $G \times H$ is MIS-normal,
- (ii) $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} = \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$ and one of G or H is IS-imprimitive,
- (iii) $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} > \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$ and H is disconnected.

Note that when condition (ii) holds, $G \times H$ is not MIS-normal. In fact, if $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} = \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$ and A is an imprimitive independent set of G , then for every $I \in I(H)$, it is easy to see that $S = (A \times V(H)) \cup (\bar{N}[A] \times I)$ is an independent set of $G \times H$ with size $\alpha(G)|H|$. While when (iii) holds, $G \times H$ is clearly not MIS-normal.

The above theorem has an immediate consequence as follows.

Corollary 1.5. If both G and H are vertex transitive graphs, then $\chi_f(G \times H) = \min\{\chi_f(G), \chi_f(H)\}$.

We leave the proof of Theorem 1.4 to the next section, while in Section 3, we discuss the MIS-normality of the direct products of more than two vertex-transitive graphs.

2. Proof of Theorem 1.4

Let S be a maximum independent set of $G \times H$. Then $|S| \geq \alpha(G)|H| \geq |G|\alpha(H)$. We will prove $|S| \leq \alpha(G)|H|$.

For every $a \in G$, define $X_a = \{x \in H : (a, x) \in S\}$. Then $|S| = \sum_{a \in V(G)} |X_a|$. Since S is an independent set of $G \times H$, for each $x \in X_a$ and $y \in X_b$, $(x, y) \notin E(H)$ whenever $(a, b) \in E(G)$. In this case, we say that X_a and X_b are cross-independent. This concept is equivalent to cross-intersecting families in extremal set theory. We refer to [14] for details.

In the language of cross-intersecting families, Borg et al. [3–5] introduced a decomposition of X_a as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} X_a^* &= \{x \in X_a : N_H(x) \cap X_a = \emptyset\}, \\ X'_a &= \{x \in X_a : N_H(x) \cap X_a \neq \emptyset\} \end{aligned}$$

and

$$X' = \bigcup_{a \in V(G)} X'_a.$$

Clearly, X_a^* is an independent set of H for every $a \in V(G)$. Here, the empty set is regarded as an independent set. We list all distinct X_a^* 's as Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_k , and define

$$B_i = \{a \in V(G) : X_a^* = Y_i\}, \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, k.$$

We then obtain a partition of $V(G)$ as $V(G) = B_1 \cup B_2 \cup \dots \cup B_k$. Then

$$|S| = \sum_{a \in V(G)} |X_a| = \sum_{a \in V(G)} (|X_a^*| + |X'_a|) = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{a \in B_i} |X_a^*| + \sum_{a \in V(G)} |X'_a|.$$

For $x \in V(H)$, set $A_x = \{a \in V(G) : x \in X'_a\}$. Clearly, $A_x = \emptyset$ if $x \in V(H) \setminus X'$, which implies that

$$|S| = \sum_{i=1}^k |Y_i| |B_i| + \sum_{x \in X'} |A_x|. \quad (1)$$

For every pair $a, b \in V(G)$, it is easy to verify that $(a, b) \notin E(G)$ if $X'_a \cap X'_b \neq \emptyset$. Therefore, A_x is an independent set of G . By Proposition 1.3 we have that for each $x \in X'$,

$$|A_x| \leq \frac{\alpha(G)}{|V(G)|} |N_G[A_x]|, \quad (2)$$

and equality holds if and only if $|A_x| = 0$, or $|A_x| = \alpha(G)$, or A_x is an imprimitive independent set of G . Furthermore, if $x \in V(H) \setminus X'$, then $A_x = \emptyset$. Therefore, (2) holds for all $x \in V(H)$.

We claim that, for each $1 \leq i \leq k$, if $x \in N_H[Y_i]$, then $B_i \subseteq \bar{N}_G[A_x]$. In fact, suppose $x \in N_H[Y_i] = N_H(Y_i) \cup Y_i$. If $x \in N_H(Y_i)$, then there exists $y \in Y_i$ such that $(x, y) \in E(H)$ and $\{(a, x), (b, y)\} \subset S$ for every $a \in A_x$ and $b \in B_i$, hence $(a, b) \notin E(G)$ since S is an independent set; if $x \in Y_i$, then for each $a \in A_x$ and $b \in B_i$, there is a $z \in X_a$ with $(x, z) \in E(H)$ and $\{(a, z), (b, x)\} \subset S$, yielding $(a, b) \notin E(G)$. For each $b \in B_i$, $X'_b \cap N_H[Y_i] = \emptyset$ since $X_b^* = Y_i$. So $B_i \cap A_x = \emptyset$ for each $x \in N_H[Y_i]$. Thus $B_i \subseteq \bar{N}_G[A_x]$, proving the claim. From this it follows that for every $x \in X'$,

$$\sum_{i: x \in N_H[Y_i]} |B_i| \leq |\bar{N}_G[A_x]| = |G| - |N_G[A_x]|,$$

i.e.,

$$|N_G[A_x]| \leq |G| - \sum_{i: x \in N_H[Y_i]} |B_i| = \sum_{i: x \in \bar{N}_H[Y_i]} |B_i|. \quad (3)$$

Combining (2) and (3), we obtain that

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{x \in X'} |A_x| &\leq \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \sum_{x \in X'} \sum_{i: x \in \bar{N}_H[Y_i]} |B_i| \quad (\text{by (2) and (3)}) \\ &\leq \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \sum_{x \in V(H)} \sum_{i: x \in \bar{N}_H[Y_i]} |B_i| \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&= \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{x \in \bar{N}_H[Y_i]} |B_i| \\
&= \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \sum_{i=1}^k |B_i| |\bar{N}_H[Y_i]|.
\end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

For each Y_i , by Proposition 1.3, we have

$$|Y_i| - \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} |N_H[Y_i]| \leq |Y_i| - \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|} |N_H[Y_i]| \leq 0. \tag{6}$$

Combining (1), (5) and (6), we get

$$\begin{aligned}
|S| &= \sum_{i=1}^k |Y_i| |B_i| + \sum_{x \in X'} |A_x| \\
&\leq \sum_{i=1}^k |Y_i| |B_i| + \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \sum_{i=1}^k |B_i| |\bar{N}_H[Y_i]| \\
&= \sum_{i=1}^k |B_i| \left(\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} |H| + |Y_i| - \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} |N_H[Y_i]| \right) \\
&= \alpha(G) |H| + \sum_{i=1}^k |B_i| \left(|Y_i| - \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} |N_H[Y_i]| \right) \\
&\leq \alpha(G) |H|.
\end{aligned}$$

This proves the equality in Theorem 1.4.

The maximality of $|S|$ implies that $|S| = \alpha(G)|H|$, from which it follows that (2), (3), (4) and (6) hold with equality. Also, from Proposition 1.3, (6) holds with equality means that for each $i = 1, 2, \dots, k$ either $Y_i = \emptyset$, or $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} = \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$ and Y_i is either imprimitive or a maximum independent set of H . Moreover, (4) holds with equality means

$$\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} \sum_{x \in V(H) \setminus X'} \sum_{i: x \in \bar{N}_H[Y_i]} |B_i| = 0.$$

However, since $|B_i| > 0$ for every i , the above equality holds only if there are no x and i with $x \in (V(H) \setminus X') \cap \bar{N}_H[Y_i]$. In other words, $(\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} \bar{N}_H[Y_i]) \subseteq X'$. On the other hand, it is clear that $X' \subseteq (\bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} \bar{N}_H[Y_i])$. Therefore, (4) holds with equality means

$$X' = \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq k} \bar{N}_H[Y_i]. \tag{7}$$

We now prove that either S is the preimage under projections of a maximum independent set of G or H , or (ii) or (iii) holds. There are two cases to be considered.

Case 1: $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} > \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$. Then, equality (6) means that $Y_i = \emptyset$ for all i , and so $X' = V(H)$ by equality (7). Hence, from equality in (2) and (3) it follows that A_x is a maximum independent set of G for all $x \in V(H)$. With this assumption we have that for any $x, y \in V(H)$ with $(x, y) \in E(H)$, if $A_x \neq A_y$, there must exist $a \in A_x$ and $b \in A_y$ with $(a, b) \in E(G)$ since both A_x and A_y are maximum independent set, so $[(a, x), (b, y)] \in E(G \times H)$, contradicting $\{(a, x), (b, y)\} \subset S$. Therefore, $A_x = A_y$ whenever $(x, y) \in E(H)$, which implies that S is the preimage of a maximum independent set of G under projections if H is connected.

Case 2: $\frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} = \frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|}$. Then, equality (6) means that for each index i either $|Y_i| = 0$ or $\alpha(H)$, or Y_i is an imprimitive independent set of H . If Y_i is an imprimitive independent set of H for some i ,

then H is IS-imprimitive. If $|Y_i| = \alpha(H)$ for all i , then $X_a = X_a^*$ is a maximum independent set of H for all $a \in V(G)$, and we can prove in a similar way to Case 1 that S is the preimage of a maximum independent set of H under projections if G is connected. We now suppose that $|Y_i| = 0$ for some i . With this assumption, then equality (7) implies $X' = V(H)$, and then equality (2) means that either A_x is either imprimitive or a maximum independent set of G for all $x \in V(H)$. If the former holds for some $x \in V(H)$, we have that G is IS-imprimitive; otherwise, the latter holds for all $x \in V(H)$, and then we can prove in the same way as in Case 1 that S is the preimage of a maximum independent set of G under projections if H is connected.

3. Concluding remark

In this section we discuss the MIS-normality of direct product of more than two graphs.

Let $n \geq 3$ be an integer, let G_1, G_2, \dots, G_n be n connected vertex-transitive graphs with $\frac{1}{2} \geq \frac{\alpha(G_1)}{|G_1|} = \dots = \frac{\alpha(G_\ell)}{|G_\ell|} > \frac{\alpha(G_{\ell+1})}{|G_{\ell+1}|} \geq \dots \geq \frac{\alpha(G_n)}{|G_n|}$, and set $G = G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_n$. From Theorem 1.4 it follows immediately that

$$\alpha(G) = \frac{\alpha(G_1)}{|G_1|} |G|.$$

By definition we see that for $i \geq 3$, $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_i$ is MIS-normal if and only if $G_1 \times \dots \times G_{i-1}$ and $(G_1 \times \dots \times G_{i-1}) \times G_i$ are both so. Observe that $(G_1 \times \dots \times G_{i-1}) \times G_i$ is MIS-normal does not mean $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_i$ is. For example, let G be the graph of Fig. 1. It is easy to see that $(G \times G) \times K_5$ is MIS-normal and $G \times G \times K_5$ is not. From Theorem 1.4 it follows that $(G_1 \times \dots \times G_{i-1}) \times G_i$ is MIS-normal if $i > \ell$. Repeating this process we have that $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_n$ is MIS-normal if $\ell = 1$. And, when $\ell \geq 2$ we need only discuss the MIS-normality of $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_\ell$. In this case we see that if one of the factors is IS-imprimitive, then the direct product is not MIS-normal. Conversely, if every G_i is assumed to be IS-primitive, the MIS-normality of $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_\ell$ depends on the IS-primitivity of $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_{\ell-1}$. We have the following two lemmas.

Lemma 3.1. (See [15, Theorem 2.6].) Let H and K be two non-bipartite vertex-transitive graphs with $\frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|} = \frac{\alpha(K)}{|K|}$. If $H \times K$ is MIS-normal, then $H \times K$ is IS-primitive.

A graph H is said to be non-empty if $E(H) \neq \emptyset$. It is well known that if H is a non-empty vertex-transitive graph, then $\frac{\alpha(H)}{|H|} \leq \frac{1}{2}$, and equality holds if and only if H is a bipartite graph. The following result on the IS-primitivity of bipartite graphs is given by Wang and Yu [13]. For completeness, we present a short proof here.

Lemma 3.2. Suppose that G is a vertex-transitive bipartite graph. Then G is IS-imprimitive if and only if G is disconnected.

Proof. It is clear that G is IS-imprimitive if G is disconnected. Conversely, if G is IS-imprimitive, then there is an imprimitive independent set A such that $\frac{|A|}{|N_G(A)|} = \frac{\alpha(G)}{|G|} = \frac{1}{2}$. Set $B = N_G(A)$. Then $|B| = |A|$ and $A \subseteq N_G(B)$. If $N_G(B) \neq A$, then we obtain that $\sum_{u \in A} d(u) \leq \sum_{v \in B} d(v)$, which induces a contradiction. Hence $N_G(B) = A$, that is, G is disconnected. \square

Applying Theorem 1.4, Lemma 3.1, the fact that the direct product of two or more bipartite graphs is disconnected, and Lemma 3.2, we obtain the following theorem.

Theorem 3.3. Let G_1, G_2, \dots, G_n be connected vertex-transitive graphs with $\frac{1}{2} \geq \frac{\alpha(G_1)}{|G_1|} = \dots = \frac{\alpha(G_\ell)}{|G_\ell|} > \frac{\alpha(G_{\ell+1})}{|G_{\ell+1}|} \geq \dots \geq \frac{\alpha(G_n)}{|G_n|}$, where $n \geq 2$ and $1 \leq \ell \leq n$. Then $G_1 \times G_2 \times \dots \times G_n$ is MIS-normal if and only if one of the following holds:

- (i) $\ell = 1$;
- (ii) $\ell > 1$, $\frac{\alpha(G_1)}{|G_1|} < \frac{1}{2}$ and G_1, G_2, \dots, G_ℓ are all IS-primitive;
- (iii) $\ell = 2$ and $\frac{\alpha(G_1)}{|G_1|} = \frac{1}{2}$.

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